When Julia Met Jaufre: Encounters with Troubadour Lyric in the Work of Julia Kristeva

Abstract:

This article analyses the role of troubadour lyric in the development of the psychoanalytic theory of Julia Kristeva, particularly her models of the semiotic, the *objet a*, and the abject. This objective necessarily involves an investigation of her relationship with Lacanian psychoanalysis, and often entails the palimpsestic project of reading Kristeva, reading Lacan, reading troubadour lyric. However, rather than simply documenting the instances of Kristeva's engagement with troubadour lyric, the paper aims, firstly, to expand the textual corpus beyond the lyrics analysed in her works in order, secondly, to outline various ways in which these lyrics might speak back to her. The first section argues that the works of Jaufre Rudel and Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, poets neglected by Kristeva and Lacan, might offer certain compromises between the two theorists on the subject of the semiotic. The second section stages an encounter between Kristeva and Bernart de Ventadorn in order to provide new perspectives on the *objet a*. The article's final part argues that the lyrics of the *trobairitz* suggest new possibilities for the abject. It concludes by speculating that, when taken in its heterogeneous entirety, the theoretical tensions outlined between Kristeva and Lacan are already articulated in the very lyric corpus that the two seek to analyse.

Key Words: Julia Kristeva; Jacques Lacan; Troubadours; Trobairitz; Old Occitan; Lyric

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Introduction

Medieval literature and psychoanalysis have long formed a productive partnership. As a theoretical framework for reading medieval texts, psychoanalysis has proven immensely useful to medievalists working across several centuries, genres, and languages. A partnership, however, works both ways, and it has been well documented that medieval literature has exerted in its turn a considerable influence on the development of psychoanalysis. The phenomenon of 'courtly love' was, of course, a long-standing interest for Jacques Lacan, who saw troubadour lyric as 'a prime example of the way in which the Symbolic realm organizes our reality' (Frelick, 2003: 108), or, more poetically, as 'quelque chose qui a brillé comme ça dans l'histoire, comme un météore' (Lacan, 1975: 79). Nevertheless, it was not until the 2006 publication of Erin Labbie's *Lacan's Medievalism* that the various strands of Lacan's engagement with the Middle Ages were rigorously documented, analysed, and criticized.

No such work on the medievalism of Julia Kristeva as of yet exists. This absence is particularly conspicuous given the fact that, as the very first page of Labbie's work admits, Kristeva is something of a beacon of medievalism among twentieth-century theorists, both in her methodologies and materials (2006: 1-2). Thus, it is towards a more coherent, comprehensive, and critical account of Kristeva's medievalism that this article gestures, beginning by tracing Kristeva's engagement with one genre of medieval literature, the troubadour lyric. Her writings on this subject may, at first, seem sparse. However, as it was for Lacan, troubadour lyric is an area with which she frequently engages in an oblique manner, though seldom simply toeing the Lacanian party line. In

terms of the semiotic, the *objet a*, and the abject, concepts that form the structure of this essay, her work can be read as a double response: both to courtly love and the troubadour lyric, and to Lacan's own treatment of these phenomena. As such, tracing Kristeva's engagement with the troubadours entails a palimpsestic project of reading Kristeva, reading Lacan, reading lyric.

More significantly, however, this article proposes an expansion of the textual corpus beyond those lyrics discussed by Lacan and Kristeva, signalling, firstly, the inclusion the so-called *trobar leu* of poets like Jaufre Rudel and Bernart de Ventadorn. A shorthand term for a lighter, less complex kind of poetry, *trobar leu* is traditionally opposed to *trobar ric*, a more intricate and opaque style, associated with poets like Arnaut Daniel. These terms are, however, retrospective: the troubadours under examination here either do not use them at all, or use them only in a very vague sense. They are terms, however, to which Lacan and Kristeva decidedly stick, often one-sidedly trumpeting the *trobar ric*. However, using Lacan and Kristeva to look at the so-called *trobar leu*, and vice-versa, might uncover the *leu*/*ric* binary as a false one that undervalues poets like Bernart and Jaufre, whose songs function in similar ways to those of poets like Arnaut, by means of an often-overlooked complexity.

Another benefit of corpus expansion will be the inclusion of the songs of the women troubadours, the *trobairitz*. Much maligned by the earlier (male) troubadour scholars, and ignored by Lacan and Kristeva, these poems offer a vital alternative perspective on love, lyric, and the Lady. They are poems, moreover, that might have been of great use to Kristeva in pushing even further with her ideas about desire, the feminine, and the abject, if only she had known to read them. As such, this wider textual

perspective will, I hope, throw into relief the richness, the limitations, and the further possibilities of the theorists' thinking when brought into contact with a wider, more representative range of lyrics that might speak back to them in compelling ways.

Desire, *Jouissance*, and the Semiotic: Jaufre Rudel, Arnaut Daniel, and Raimbaut de Vaqueiras

Although arguably one of the most influential troubadours in the development and popularization of the *canso* (love song) form, Jaufre Rudel did not get off to the best of starts in the world of psychoanalysis. In Seminar XX, Lacan makes a somewhat scathing remark about the poet of Blaye, declaring 'malgré tout, je préfère quand même Aristote à Geoffrey Rudel' (1975: 65), followed in the transcription by a mocking 'hein'. Even if, as Labbie notes, Seminar VII sees Lacan's thinking vacillate 'between Aristotelian ethics and the poetics of courtly love' (2006: 100), this aside still seems somewhat unfair, conflating a twelfth-century Occitan poet with a Greek philosopher from over a millennium earlier. Lacan shows much more generosity towards Arnaut Daniel and his 'trouvailles formelles exceptionnellement riches' (1986: 191). Indeed, as Bruce Holsinger notes, Arnaut's scatological *Pois Raimonz et Truc Malecs* was possibly the only text over the course of Lacan's seminar to be read from beginning to end (2005: 86). In Seminar VII, Lacan describes Arnaut's poem as 'une pièce du dossier de l'amour courtois dont les spécialistes eux-mêmes ne savent littéralement que faire [...] C'est un *hapax*' (1986: 191). Where the medievalists falter, Lacan steps in, presenting the scenario of this poem as the

limit case of courtly love: 'ne pousse-t-il [Arnaut] pas l'extrême désir jusqu'à s'offrir lui-même à un sacrifice qui comporte sa propre abolition ?' (1986: 193).

Yet, the admittedly more canonical Jaufre hardly deserves to be disparaged in this way, for his texts provide equally convincing evidence of the Lacanian structure of desire. *Non sap chantar*, for example, although the manuscript witnesses vary significantly for this lyric, contains one *cobla* (stanza) that describes dying of love in disturbingly physical terms:

> Colp de joy me fier que m'auci
> Ab poncha d'amor que.m sostra
> Lo cor, don la carns magrira
> S'em breu merce no.l pren de mi ;
> E anc hom tan gen no mori
> Ab tan dous mal ni no.n s'escha (ll. 13–18)

> A stroke of *joi* strikes me, which kills me | with a barb of love that takes from me | my heart, wherefore my flesh will grow thin | if soon love does not have mercy on me; | and never did anyone die so gently | with such sweet pain nor did such things ever happen so.[1]

Here, love is a weapon, and joy is a blow that sees the singer's heart removed from his body, whose very flesh withers and weakens. The poet piles up verbs of death, rhyming his own self-reference 'mi' with 'auci' (kills) and 'mori' (dies). If Arnaut's *domna* Ena

[1] All translations are my own.

demands the ultimate sacrifice from her singer, then she can do so no more directly than Jaufre's love who 'pot ben dir sa man m'auci' (l. 23; can well say that her hand kills me), harming him by her own hand as surely as if she had physically struck him. Finally, Jaufre succinctly sums up in one single line of *Non sap chantar*: 'un' amor lonhdana m'auci' (l. 25; a faraway love kills me). If the love-suffering of the singer in this poem cannot qualify as the poet's 'propre abolition', then surely very little else can.

Ultimately, Jaufre's *amor de lonh* translates the impossibility of attaining the object of desire into a recognizable poetic trope, employing the metaphor of distance to render it intelligible and, as Labbie puts it, 'palatable' (2006: 129). For Lacan, the phenomenon that moderns call 'courtly love' is not love at all: it is desire, dressed up by Jaufre as *amor de lonh*, dressed down by Arnaut as scatological metaphors. Love, on the other hand, is merely the effect of acknowledging the impossibility of attaining the object of desire. Perhaps the reason why Lacan slights Jaufre is precisely because of the poet's very palatability. Nevertheless, despite Jaufre's apparent inferiority to Arnaut and Aristotle, Lacan's theory of desire is just as present in Jaufre's so-called *trobar leu* as it is in Arnaut's *trobar ric*, merely couched in alternative terms that Lacan either does not see or simply finds less pleasing.

Kristeva shares Lacan's fondness for Arnaut Daniel. In the essay 'Les troubadours: du « grand chant courtois » au récit allégorique', collected in *Histoires d'amour*, Kristeva describes troubadour lyric as an unmediated expression of *joi*, as '[l']inscription la plus immédiate de la jouissance' (1983: 349). Kristeva uses the term *jouissance* in the Lacanian sense of an excessive enjoyment that transgresses the prohibitions of the pleasure principle. *Jouissance* is located at the tipping point from pleasure into pain,

where excess pleasure is experienced as a kind of suffering. The expression of *jouissance* involves, for Kristeva, remarkably high levels of linguistic artifice, including ambiguity, homophony, paradox, contradiction, and metaphor: 'c'est dans l'*ambiguïté de la métaphore* que se recueille également ce débordement de la signification par le *joi*' (1983: 351). In 'Les troubadours', she finds an abundance of this resistance to transparent signification in Arnaut, whose *Ab gai so conde e leri* she reproduces in full, both in the original Old Occitan and in a modern French translation, formulating a reading of it that Sarah Kay has praised as 'sympathetic to the way in which the medieval imaginary channels emotional affect' (1999: 218).

However, elsewhere in *Histoires d'amour*, in 'Ego affectus est', another medievalist essay concerning Bernard of Clairvaux, Kristeva also finds this intense, affective compositional practice at work in other troubadours:

> De Marcabrun à Joffré Rudel et Guiraud de Borneuil, on demeure ébloui par l'intensité de l'incantation: la courtoisie est un chant de joie, de *joi*, avant d'être un message à une Dame imposante et plus ou moins accessible. [...] Le troubadour est au moins sûr de posséder le Verbe dans lequel précisément il taille son être d'amoureux. (1983: 192)

Clearly, Kristeva is more admiring of Jaufre than was Lacan, as she cursorily locates in the poems of these troubadours 'la jouissance lyrique interne à l'incantation' (1983: 192). That said, she does not offer the kind of extended literary analysis of them that she does for Arnaut's *Ab gai so conde e leri.*

However, just as Lacan's claims of Arnaut in Seminar VII proved themselves equally relevant to the songs of Jaufre, so too can it be seen that many of the comments Kristeva makes of Arnaut's lyric in 'Les troubadours' are eminently applicable to the poet of Blaye mentioned in 'Ego affectus est'. In Jaufre's *Quan lo rossinhols*, for example, the noun *joi* is itself submitted to this play of linguistic forms, repeated as verbal, adverbial, adjectival, and nominal morpheme throughout the poem until precise comprehension of the phrases becomes obscured: 'Car lay ay joy meravilhos | Per qu'ieu la jau ab joy jauzen' (ll. 17–18; For there I have marvellous *joi* | because I rejoice there [| enjoy her] with *joi* rejoicing). Equally, in his *Pro ai del chan essenhadors*, Jaufre sings: 'E mias sion tals amors | don ieu sia jauzens jauzitz' (ll. 11–12; And let my love be such | from which I may be rejoicing joyed). Given that the masculine noun *joi* encompasses the meanings of both *joie* (from *gaudia*) and *jeu* (from *jocus*) (Zumthor, 1995: 15), *joi* exceeds signification first in its own sematic polysemy, and second in the polyptoton that Jaufre applies to it. Its repeated sounds take precedence over its already ambiguous meaning and propel the poem into the semiotic register.

Indeed, John Lechte notes how this kind of technique underlies Kristeva's understanding of lyric as an incantation and 'thus fundamentally semiotic, with rhythm and melody dominating over the message to the lady' (1990: 179). Facilitated by its immense capacity for linguistic play, the *joi* of troubadour lyric is conceived of in terms of the semiotic *chora*: 'Notre discours -- le discours -- chemine contre elle, c'est-à-dire s'appuie sur elle en même temps qu'il la repousse' (Kristeva, 1974: 23). Or, as Stacey Keltner describes it: 'the *chora* both receives and refuses the form and meaning given to it. In its refusals, the semiotic breaks with received meanings' (2011: 29). Kristeva

approaches poetic language, and troubadour lyric as a particularly keen manifestation of that language, as a specific modality of it that plays to the semiotic, and that fosters those breaks with meaning.

Moreover, the phonetic resemblance of this *joi* to the poet's own name further has the effect of lexicalizing 'Jaufre' both as proper noun and poet. This device could suggest an authorial stamp on the poem, the very noises of the poet's own name conjuring up *joi*'s connotations of delight and play. In Kristevan terms, however, it is more significant that the poet implicates himself in the substitution of physical pleasure with textual *jouissance*, participating in the movement of both poem and poet out of the semantic register and into the semiotic. Arnaut's nonsensical *tornada* performs a similar function, inscribing his name in an infamously indecipherable break with meaning: 'Eu son Arnauz c'amas l'aura | e chas la lebr'a lo buo | e nadi contra siberna' (ll. 43–5; I am Arnaut who gathers the wind | and hunts the hare with the ox | and swims against the current). What Arnaut achieves in the cryptic terms of his *tornada,* Jaufre achieves in the very phonetics of his poetry, involving himself in his poem's semiotic shifts, with both poets privileging sound over sense. As such, the distinctions between the 'schools' of *trobar leu* and *trobar ric* begin to blur. Even if Lacan, and Kristeva after him, found it harder to spot – or was less inclined to see it -- in the *trobar leu*, both Jaufre and Arnaut show in their works their pleasure and playfulness in language, their *joi* in it, and both reveal their own personal investment in the movement of the song into the realms of the semiotic.

However, couching this movement in the terms of the 'inscription la plus immédiate' proves problematic when re-examined by the Lacanian standpoint from which Kristeva is attempting to depart here. Located as it is in the pre-mirror stage, Kristeva's

semiotic presupposes the possibility of something pre-subjective, something prior to mediation: 'La *chora* elle-même -- en tant que ruptures et articulations -- rythme -- est préalable à l'évidence, au vraisemblable, à la spatialité et à la temporalité' (1974: 23). This pre-mediated subject is something for which the Lacanian system simply does not make room, since for Lacan it is only through mediation that the subject comes to constitute itself as such. For Lacan and Kristeva, then, the semiotic represents somewhat of a parting of the ways. Troubadour lyric, however, might itself supply a kind of compromise, facilitating in some measure a Lacanian rehabilitation of the Kristevan semiotic.

Kristeva's claim for spontaneity in troubadour lyric is, at best, tenuous. It seems somewhat insufficient to say, as she does of the *trobar ric*, that the complexities of love necessitate complexities of form (1983: 349). Nor can one claim that troubadour lyric is anything other than heavily mediated by both its poetic and musical composition. In the very song that Kristeva analyses, Arnaut emphasizes the crafting of his words in the physical terms of creating an object: 'Fas moz e capus e doli, | e seran verai e sert | can n'aurai passada lima' (ll. 2–4; I make words and polish [them] and smooth [them] | and they will be true and sure | when I have filed them down). Raimbaut de Vaqueiras' multilingual *descort* (a poem whose stanzas are metrically non-identical) constitutes a *coup de maître* of this kind of mediation, sequencing *coblas* in Occitan, Gascon, French, and forms of Italo- and Ibero-Romance. Tempting as it may be to conclude that Raimbaut was fluent in all these languages, such a feat is unlikely. Roy Hagman suggests that there was no real reason for him to be familiar with French (2006: 23), while Roger Wright argues that this is essentially an Occitan poem that adapts its phonetic features in each

stanza to correspond to the dialects and languages that the poet aims to imitate (2005: 469). Surely such a crafted poetic creation categorically rules out Kristeva's claims for immediacy, even in its moment of performance: this is a well thought out piece of poetry performed by a well practised singer.

Yet, we need not, for all that, abandon altogether Kristeva's interpretation of troubadour lyric. Rather, it works particularly well if we allow the lyric form to turn her reading on its head, if we consider that it is perhaps not in its immediacy but, precisely, in the *complexity* of the lyric that the semiotic might be seen to emerge. It is *precisely* the excessive mediation in troubadour lyric's poetic technique, musical composition, and formal complexity that gives rise to that 'débordement de la signification par le *joi*'.

The subtle complexity of Jaufre's poems certainly supports this notion, his experience of *jouissance* deriving as much from the excess of his poetry as from the excess of his love. To sum up Frank M. Chambers' exposition of Jaufre's poetics (1985: 80), the troubadour's attributed works evidence fairly simple versification: four of the six (*Lanquan li jorn*, *Pro ai del chan, No sap chantar,* and *Bels m'es l'estius*) consist entirely of oxytonic octosyllables; *Quan lo rossignols* varies these with a paroxytonic heptasyllable as the penultimate 'C' rhyme of each *cobla*; and *Quan lo rius* uses heptasyllables with masculine and feminine rhymes. In terms of rhyme, Jaufre's *coblas* rarely exceed seven lines: only *Pro ai del chan* reaches eight, while *No sap chantar* consists of six. As such, if the poem reaches 'D' rhymes (as four do) or 'E' rhymes (as only two do), then they always function as *rims estramps* (i.e. rhyming only with the 'D' or 'E' rhymes of other *coblas*).

However, as Chambers notes of *Lanquan li jorn*, it is precisely Jaufre's 'simple versification and rhyme scheme' that contributes to the creation of a 'misty atmosphere' in his poems (1985: 82). There is a kind of artifice of simplicity here, a carefully constructed ease that poses as plain and spontaneous, but conceals its own intricate inner workings. To expand upon Chambers' example, *Lanquan li jorn* consists of no fewer than seven *coblas unissonans* (where the rhyme scheme and sounds are the same in each stanza), made up exclusively of oxytonic octosyllables, with a double word-refrain ('lonh') running through each *cobla*. There is a kind of harmonious unity throughout the poem, each *cobla* sounding uncannily like the last, such that the progression of a narrative, or even of sense, simply slips away from the listener. Furthermore, five versions are extant of the melody of *Lanquan li jorn*, of which three appear alongside the text, transmitting a song that Hendrik van der Werf describes as 'somewhat more ornate than most troubadour songs', marking, for example, the repeated 'lonh' with a melismatic flourish (1995: 137, 144). Van der Werf is right to hesitate over interpreting this musical intricacy as a way of emphasizing the meaning of 'lonh' (1995: 145). If anything, techniques like melisma release the word from its signifying function, the proliferation of notes leaving the listener not with a clearer understanding of the word, but with a collection of harmonious sounds. Ultimately, it is this steady repetition of Jaufre's regular verse, here and elsewhere, that itself gives rise to the incantatory quality of the semiotic, the smooth arrangement of recurrent sounds masking a deceptively complex song in terms of its poetic and musical composition.

Again breaking down the polarisation of *tobar leu* and *trobar ric*, the lyrics of both Jaufre and Raimbaut might be said to constitute a formal radicalization of that very

mediation of which Kristeva deems them void, but which might itself act as the catalyst for the activation of the semiotic. These lyrics allow the *chora* to surface without laying claim to the unmediated immediacy that the Lacanian system debunks and dismisses, incorporating the semiotic instead as a viable Lacanian possibility.

The Lady, the Thing, and the *Objet a*: Bernart de Ventadorn

Lacan imagines the object of lyric thus: 'la création de la poésie consiste à poser [...] un objet que j'appellerai affolant, un partenaire inhumain' (1986: 180). Not only might the invocation of the inhuman call up the abject as we will later see, but such an argument is also what allows Slavoj Žižek to characterize the courtly Lady as the Thing of 'monstrous character', of 'traumatic Otherness' (2005: 90). The Thing is the name given in the symbolic order to the real that lies just beyond it, beyond representation, language, and consciousness. Moreover, it is precisely as the Thing that Lacan understands *domna* Ena in Arnaut's poem, describing her as 'la chose, la sienne, celle qui se trouve au cœur d'elle-même dans son vide cruel' (1986: 193). The terrifying, cruel Lady-Thing is a notion that Kristeva largely retains when she writes in *Soleil Noir* that the 'dépressif narcissique', s/he who, like the troubadour, suffers the loss and inaccessibility of the object of his or her desire, is 'en deuil non pas d'un Objet, mais de la *Chose*' (1987: 22, my emphasis).

The Lady-Thing is detectable in much troubadour lyric, a particularly good illustration being the song *Can l'erba fresch'e.lh folha* by Bernart de Ventadorn. The poem opens with the excessive proliferation of *joi* noted earlier (ll. 5–8), before describing how the lover would run to his Lady, were it not for fear of her: 'si no fos per

paor' (l. 22; if it were not for fear). In stanza four, the poet candidly sings of his love *and* fear, not opposing the two, but connecting them simply with the conjunction 'e': 'tan am midons e la tenh car, | e tan la dopt' e la reblan' (ll. 25–6; I love my lady so much and hold her dear | and fear her so much and serve her). The Lady-Thing terrifies him, as the very parting line and final word of the *tornada* make clear: 'Messatger, vai, e no m'en prezes mens, | s'eu del anar vas midons sui temens' (ll. 57–8; 'Messenger, go, and think no less of me | if I am afraid to approach my lady).

Furthermore, Lacan notes in Seminar VII how 'l'objet féminin est vidé de toute substance réelle' (1986: 179), and for Žižek too, 'the place of the Lady-Thing is originally *empty'* (2005: 94, my emphasis). It is, however, in Kristeva that we find the most emphatic account of the Lady as, above all, *absent*:

> La chanson courtoise ne décrit ni ne raconte. Elle est essentiellement message d'elle-même, signe de l'intensité amoureuse. Elle n'a pas d'objet -- la dame est rarement définie [...] elle est simplement un destinataire imaginaire, prétexte de l'incantation (1983: 354).

The erasure of the Lady has been taken up by feminist critics like E. Jane Burns, who argues that, rather than to or about the Lady, 'the lyric poet speaks not only about himself but also *to* himself' (2001: 41). Similarly, Sarah Kay argues that the *domna* is no real woman at all, but a kind of third sex, a female face endowed with the function of a feudal lord (1990: 91). This masculinized, feudalized *domna* can certainly be seen at work in *Can l'erba fresch'e.lh folha*, for when the poet relates how he asks nothing of his lady (l.

28), his ambiguity might lead us to consider not only amorous favours, but quite simply things, goods, wealth or land. Equally, the 'ben et onor' (l. 30) that she does him might be read as easily in socio-economic terms as in the sexual ones the poet seems to elicit.

These interpretations are both justified and persuasive. However, standing as she does at the problematic and productive intersection of feminism and psychoanalysis, it should also be remarked that Kristeva is not radically abandoning a Lacanian perspective here. When she calls the Lady the 'prétexte de l'incantation', she is not only supporting feminist analyses of the real woman's absence, but is also aligning that Lady with the *objet a* in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the unattainable object cause of desire that substitutes itself for the real. The Lady-*objet a* generates that very desire of which she is the object, and her absence is fundamentally required by the poet-lover, who must, of necessity, lack her. Indeed, just as Lacan's own lexis moved away from the *Chose* to the *objet a,* so too might the Lady be understood less as the direct embodiment of the Thing than as a metonymic signifier, a stand-in for the real rather than the real itself.

Lacan says that the subject needs to be deprived of the real: 'ce que demande l'homme, ce qu'il ne peut faire que demander, c'est d'être privé de quelque chose de réel' (1986: 179). Pushing further than Lacan, Kristeva argues that this deprivation, this loss of the real is something that is not only inevitable, but also *mourned*: the lover is specifically '*en deuil* [...] de la Chose' (my emphasis). Kristeva emphasizes much more than Lacan and Žižek not only the lover's fear of, but also his *desire* for the terrifying Lady, not only his need for her absence, but also his *regret* for it. For Kristeva, the Lady is the impossible love-object that is mourned and internalized, and that drives not only the singer's terror, but also his longing, his sorrow, and, ultimately, his own terrifying violence.

Kristeva's emphasis plays out interestingly in *Can l'erba fresch'e.lh folha*. If the experience of Lacanian desire is 'yet another new ordeal, yet one more postponement' (Žižek, 2005: 96), then Bernart here attempts to project this postponement onto the Lady as a fault of her own: 'Be deuri'om domna blasmar | can trop vai son amic tarzan' (ll. 49–50; A man should truly blame his lady | when she continues to keep him waiting so much). Moreover, this postponement takes the form of talking about love: 'que lonja paraula d'amar | es grans enois e par d'enjan' (ll. 51–2; For long talk of love | is highly tedious and the same as deceit). By eliciting his love-speech, it is she who, like a good *objet a*, prompts him to compose a song about love in order to express his pretend desire for that love's consummation, all the while delaying it further. The poet may *appear* to be calling for a little less conversation, but he is the only one talking.

Moreover, his speech requires and enforces her silence. Playing on the ambiguity of 'trobar', Bernart wants to find a Lady, or compose one for himself, who is alone, asleep, and unspeaking: 'Be la volgra sola trobar | que dormis, o.n fezes semblan' (ll. 41–2; Much would I like to find [/compose] her alone | while she was asleep, or pretended to be). He imagines her mouth made silent under violent kisses that will leave their mark for a month: 'e baizera.lh la bocha en totz sens | si que d'un mes i paregra lo sens' (ll. 39–40; And I would kiss her mouth all over | so that for a month the mark will show there). The polysemy of 'sen' is particularly unsettling here, translatable not only as 'way' and 'mark', but also as 'sense' and 'meaning', as if the very act of signification were itself a kind of sexual aggression. Finally, Bernart imagines any objecting onlooker made as speechless as a child: 'S'eu saubes la gen enchantar | mei enemic foran efan | que ja us no saubra triar | ni dir re que.ns tornes a dan' (ll. 3–6; If I knew how to bewitch people | my enemies

would be children | so that they could never betray us | nor say anything that might do us harm).

This is a song about silence, both the Lady's and Bernart's own, for he also laments his own inability to communicate: 'que no.lh demostre mo talan' (l. 18; that I do not show her my desire); 'c'anc de me no.lh auzei parlar' (l. 27; that I never dared to speak to her of myself); 'pus no valh tan qu'eu lo.lh deman' (l. 44; since I am not so worthy as to ask it of her). From a Lacanian perspective, this is the silence that the lover requires. Bernart cannot envisage a speaking woman because there can be no dialogue with the Lady-Thing who 'precludes any intersubjective relationship of empathy' (Žižek, 2005: 93). However, from a Kristevan perspective, this silence is itself the source and symptom of the singer's 'mal' and 'dolor' (l. 29), of his longing and of his violent imaginings. The Kristevan critic might conjecture that if, in his mournful state, the poet has internalized the lost love-object of the Lady-Thing, then her terrifying characteristics resurface in his own sexually aggressive persona. It is he who imagines the silencing of any other possible interlocutor, even shutting down any response from his own messenger with his *tornada*'s forceful imperatives. In short, the most terrifying protagonist of this poem is less the absent Lady than the mournful poet himself.

This poem, however, has arguably much wider-reaching consequences for Lacanian and Kristevan analyses, primarily relating to its treatment of language. Bernart's only strategy for fantasizing the attainment of the 'intersubjective relationship' from which he is necessarily barred is to circumnavigate language altogether. In an imagined direct address to the *domna*, expressed via repeated first person plural verbs and pronouns, he sings:

per Deu, domna, pauc *esplecham* d'amor!

vai s'en lo tems, e *perdem* lo melhor!

parlar *degram* ab cubertz entresens,

e, pus no.*ns* val arditz, valgues *nos* gens! (ll. 45–8; my emphasis)

By God, lady, we benefit little from love! | Time passes and we lose the best [of it]! We should talk with hidden signs | and, since boldness avails us not, let cunning avail us!

His need for alternative signs, however, serves only to underline the main crisis of this poem, which is, principally, a linguistic one. *Can l'erba fresch'e.lh folha* not only supports readings of the Lady as both Thing and *objet a*, and of the poet as both requiring and mourning her absence, but it is also a song that turns on its singer. It reminds us, as Lacan does, of the subject's fundamental enmeshment in language, of the fundamental impossibility of Bernart's fantasized 'cubertz entresens'. And it also reminds us, as Kristeva does, of our inability fully to control language. Not only do poetic words flirt with the semiotic, as we have seen in Jaufre, but for Bernart their signifying function is radically destabilized. The poet cannot speak, the Lady is silenced, and the song itself fails to communicate the singer's love sufficiently to his Lady, yet betrays too much of it to his 'enemic'. A flatly Lacanian reading might here reveal *Can l'erba* simply as a poem about a man who cannot stop singing of his Lady-*objet a*, of his need for silence, absence, lack. However, Kristeva's formulation of a Lacanian psychoanalysis more seriously engaged with feminism enables a reading of *Can l'erba* as a poem less about a horrifying

mistress than about what we might perhaps instead call the Poet-Thing, the terrifying singer who, singing primarily to and about himself, cannot control his own violent desires any more than the words he employs to express them.

The Lady, the Abject, and the Sublime: The *Trobairitz*

The *objet a* leads us to another Kristevan modality of conceptualizing the courtly Lady, namely, as abject. Kristeva describes the abject in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* as the eruption in the symbolic order of that which had been expelled from it, and as that which traumatizes the subject by troubling the boundaries of self and other, interior and exterior. Thus, we experience the abject in the disgust we feel for faeces or corpses, for example, which for Kristeva is ultimately due to the subject's rejection of the mother (1980: 10–11, 20).

Lacan, for his part, had already linked the notion of the *objet a* to that of 'filth':

> nous fondons l'assurance du sujet dans sa rencontre avec la saloperie qui peut le supporter, avec le petit *a* dont il n'est pas illégitime de dire que sa présence est nécessaire' (1973: 232).

However, it is Kristeva who pushes this connection further when she argues in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* that *jouissance*, that same surplus constitutive of the *objet a*, goes hand in hand with the abject: 'la jouissance seule fait exister l'abject comme tel' (1980: 17). This is why 'the subject finds the abject both repellant and seductive' (McAfee, 2004: 49). For

Kristeva, the abject is not the object of desire as such, rather desire is itself bound up with the experience both of *jouissance* and of the abject:

> On ne le [l'abject] connaît pas, on ne le désire pas, on en jouit. Violemment et avec douleur. Et, comme dans la jouissance où l'objet dit « a » du désir éclate avec le miroir brisé où le moi cède son image pour se mirer dans l'Autre, l'abject n'a rien d'objectif ni même d'objectal. (1980: 17).

So much is certainly true of a poet such as Jaufre Rudel in whose entire oeuvre the supposed object of his desire, the word *domna,* is not once articulated (Rosenstein and Wolf, 1983: 116), though desiring her necessarily involves the experience of abject suffering. In *Quan lo rius de la fontana*, for example, Jaufre describes his lovesickness in startlingly physical terms: 'Mas pueys torn en revolina | per qu.em n'espert e n'aflam' (ll. 31–2; but then I twist and turn | wherefore I despair and burn for it [her]). Reconciling the antithesis of pain and pleasure (Cholakian, 1990: 108), Jaufre sings: 'Que pus es ponhens d'espina | La dolors que per joy sana' (ll. 26–7; for it is sharper than a thorn | the pain that heals through *joi*). However, adopting the Kristevan perspective, that pain can be seen to manifest itself in the specific form of the abject, all these lines conjuring up images of pain, torture, wounds, cuts, and burns. Not only is this abjection the condition of loving the Lady, but it is also the precondition for poetic composition, in what might be termed a value-system of abject aesthetics: the poet's skill is to be measured by his level of pain.

Contrastingly, the lyric representation of the Lady herself becomes more strongly aligned with the sublime. The thirteenth-century convergence of the *domna* and the

Virgin, of secular courtly love and Mariolatry, becomes one of Kristeva's main focuses in the 1977 essay 'Hérétique de l'amour', first published in the journal *Tel Quel,* later reprinted as 'Stabat Mater' in *Histoires d'amour*. Here she explains how: 'Des aspects fondamentaux de l'amour occidental convergent enfin sur Marie [...] le courant marial et le courant courtois se rejoignent' (1983: 307–308). Equally, in a letter to Catherine Clément on 18th April 1997, recorded in *Le féminin et le sacré,* Kristeva reiterates a point made in the earlier essay, where she identifies the thirteenth-century court of Blanche of Castile as the locus where 'la Vierge devient explicitement le centre de l'amour courtois : les qualités de la femme désirée sont agglomérées à celles de la sainte mère' (1998: 130). Pinpointing this trend to a single court is perhaps going a step too far, but it is significant that the Lady, newly aligned with the Holy Mother, no longer demands her lover's self-abjection, but instead begins to facilitate his union with the divine.

This may seem a contradictory move on Kristeva's part, on the one hand construing the Lady as the terrifying Thing that one abjectly enjoys, and on the other documenting her elevation to religious metaphor. However, from a Lacanian perspective, the concept of the terrifying yet sublime Lady-Thing is anything but a contradiction in terms. Rather, it is *precisely* in her capacity as Thing, or as *objet a*, that the Lady's sublime qualities are to be located: she is that 'concrete, material object of need that assumes a sublime quality the moment it occupies the place of the Thing' (Žižek, 2005: 96). Even if Lacan had laid the theoretical groundwork here, this seeming self-contradiction is characteristic of Kristeva's thinking not only concerning the Lady's sublime or abject status, but concerning the feminine more generally. Toril Moi argues that Kristeva's work emphasizes female marginality, and that for Kristeva the fact that 'women [are] seen as

the limit of symbolic order [...] has enabled male culture sometimes to vilify women [...] and sometimes to elevate them' (2002: 166). This point surely feeds into what Sarah Kay, following Lacan, identifies as the simultaneous praising and vilifying of women throughout troubadour lyric (1999: 219). For Kristeva, the Lady, like all women, is configured as a liminal figure on the borders of the symbolic order, that space by turns both sublime and abject, the unstable site of the re-eruption of the real into the symbolic. The Lady, for Kristeva, is consistently located at the limits of the culturally intelligible.

A problem, however, remains. Although providing theoretical grounds for understanding the Lady as the sublime catalyst for her lover's abjection, Kristeva might be criticized for never exploring the possibility that the Lady might herself be presented as abject, or might represent herself as such. Yet, if in Arnaut's poem for *domna* Ena the 'terrifying proximity of the very real flesh and mucous of the woman [...] serves as a close-up that is too close' (Labbie: 2006, 98), then this could not be further from the truth in the case of the *trobairitz*, the female troubadours to which neither Kristeva nor Lacan makes any reference whatsoever.

The songs of the *trobairitz* have been the subject of much critical debate, dismissed by several (male) critics as inherently inferior in aesthetic value to the troubadours. In 1934 Alfred Jeanroy dismissed them as 'exercices littéraires', in which he saw only a 'paresse d'esprit' and an 'oubli de toute pudeur et de toute convenance' (1934: 317). In his 1979 essay, Pierre Bec reductively formulated the *trobairitz* texts as a 'textualité féminine' (1979: 249), while in 1983 Jean-Charles Huchet labelled them simply a 'fiction littéraire' (1983: 64). Pioneering the critical rehabilitation of the *trobairitz* in her influential 1976 edition of *trobairitz* songs, Meg Bogin argued the exact opposite, namely

that: 'unlike the men, who created a complex poetic vision, the women wrote about their intimate feelings' (1980: 67-8). However, to say that *only* women *only* speak of their feelings is to deny them recognition of their poetic artistry. Matilda Bruckner, lead editor of a 1995 *trobairitz* edition, addresses this problem in her 1992 essay, where she emphasizes the literariness of their poetry: 'any efforts to distinguish the particular character of their voices must recognize at the same time the rhetorical play that sustains the appearance of spontaneity and feeling' (1992: 867). Simon Gaunt pushes this point further, arguing in a more political sense that 'the *trobairitz* do not simply internalize male views of their gender' (1995: 171). While every bit as literarily and poetically accomplished as the male singers, the position of the *trobairitz* is not necessarily a passive one of imitating the male-authored text, but one which might challenge from within both the androcentric lyric system and the male-dominated troubadour tradition. One of their tools in this enterprise, used to counter the relentless idealizations of the *domna,* is the female singer's representation of her own capacity to be abject.

In this, the song *Mout avetz faich lonc estatge* by Castelloza is a *tour de force*. Castelloza presents her body in various abject states: in pain, 'et es mi greu e salvatge' (l. 4; and it is painful and savage to me); in madness, 'e sai que fatz hi follatge' (l. 13; I know that I commit folly); and in illness, 'car per pauc de malananssa | mor dompna s'om tot no.il lanssa' (ll. 39–40; for a lady all but dies of sickness if no man ever lances it [| tends to it]). As Sarah Kay notes, the female body is here presented as 'infected, its desire a disease which only a man can cure, provided she submits herself to the (male) violence implicit in *lansar*' (1990: 109). With references to death and killing, Castelloza even conjures up that most abject of images, her own corpse: 'm'i avetz mort' (l. 8; you have

killed me) and 'tost me trobaretz fenida' (l. 38). This second line is particularly loaded, playing as it does on the dual meanings of the verb 'trobar' as 'to find' or 'to compose [poetry]' as well as of 'fenida', signifying not only 'dead', but also, as Bruckner endnotes, the *tornada* of a *canso* (Bruckner, Shephard & White, 2000: 150, drawing on van Vleck 1989). As such, it might be read as 'you will find me dead' or 'you will compose me an *envoi*'. Not only does Castelloza expose the violent consequences of courtly lyric for the *domna*, but the self-representation of her body also unlocks the abject potential of that body when its borders are not being policed by the structures of courtliness into which the male singer fits her flesh – in the courtly corset of the *canso.*

This resistant approach is played out in an equally visual way in the *tenso* (debate song) *Na Carenza al bel cors avinenz*, between a Lady Carenza and two sisters, Alaisina and Yselda. This poem's structure of two *coblas unissonans* and two *tornadas* suggests a symmetry in which each speaker, or set of speakers, is given equal dialogue: the fair exchange of words between speaking women here becomes a substitute for the male troubadour's narcissistic, self-referential monologuing about a woman who cannot talk back. As the women discuss the merits of motherhood and chastity, the notion of male presence is again ensured, but reduced to the status of hypothesis, and is framed by female-female dialogue. In this circuit of female interlocutors, the female body is, to be sure, shaped by the more expected forms of courtly beauty, 'prez et beltatz, iovenz, frescas colors' (l. 10; worth and beauty, youth, fresh complexion). There is even a possible allusion to the Virgin herself in the 'umbra de ghirenza' (l. 22; shadow of protection), perhaps posited by Na Carenza as a role model for the two sisters (O'Sullivan, 2003: 196-7). However, the female body is also able to emerge in its abject

potentialities, here related particularly to the maternal body, pregnancy and childbirth: 'que las tetinas penden aval ios | e llo ventrilh es ruat e'noios' (ll. 19-20; for the breasts hang down low | and the belly is stretched and made ugly). As such, the maternal body that is, according to Kristeva, primarily disavowed by the subject, and whose re-eruptions into psychic life are constitutive of the abject, is allowed to surface in this conversation between women, in this woman's song, and in the court in which it is sung.

These lyrics are much more than an 'exercice littéraire' or an example of 'textualité féminine'. The 'choquant oubli de toute pudeur' functions as a political reappropriation of the abject potentialities of the female body in order to speak back to the tradition of male-authored lyric from within that form's own structures. Such a strategy might also open up the Kristevan abject to the potential for feminist politicization and deployment.

Conclusion

'Julia meets Jacques meet Jaufre' may have been a more fitting title for the present article, since the Kristevan interpretative lens might, ultimately, be conceptualized as a kind of anamorphic Lacanian one: a looking through Lacan, but a looking awry. Working within Lacanian terms, she refocuses their emphasis, accentuating the Lady-Thing's *absence* and her *mourned* loss. Working between Lacanian terms, she develops her own theories, allowing troubadour lyric to emerge as a semiotic incantation of textual *jouissance*, and the experience of the lover as one of abject enjoyment.

It is, however, insufficient simply to triangulate Kristeva, Lacan, and the troubadours, as if the latter were one undifferentiated mass. By expanding the target

corpus to include the songs of the so-called *trobar leu* and of the *trobairitz*, as well as by submitting individual lyrics to the close literary analysis from which both Kristeva and Lacan generally shy away, a rather different picture emerges of the relationship between troubadour lyric and psychoanalysis. Rather than merely accommodating Kristevan and Lacanian theories, the tensions between those theories can be seen as *already* articulated in the works they analyse. Mirroring Kristeva's approach to fixed Lacanian conventions in twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory, the medieval *trobairitz* contest established norms among the male troubadours, formulating, like Kristeva, an alternative account of courtly love, the Lady, and her relation to the symbolic.

It is, of course, almost always possible for the Lacanian to dismiss Kristeva, like the male medievalists did the *trobairitz*, as constantly falling back into the systems, whether psychoanalytic or poetic, from which they are aiming to depart – but such a dismissal is perhaps too easy. At no point does Kristeva look to abandon Lacan altogether, neither do the *trobairitz* categorically renounce the lyric form. Rather, Kristeva and the women troubadours consistently and productively question established assumptions, searching for ways out of and back into the Lacanian and lyric systems. In this way, courtly love lyric emerges not simply as the site of convergence between past and present, text and theory, Lacan and Kristeva, not merely as the site where the two theories battle it out, but as the site where that encounter had already been played out centuries before.

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